Louise is leading the fight for a smart and secure northern border - and is working hard to make certain that Western New York remains protected and an international gateway for tourism and trade.

Western New Yorkers do not think of the bi-national Niagara region as two countries, but as one community with a river running through it. Cross-border tourism and trade supports thousands of local jobs and pumps millions of dollars into our regional economy. Yet new border policies, if implemented incorrectly, threaten to jeopardize our economic security while doing little to secure the region.

The Departments of Homeland Security and State are currently rushing forward with an ill-advised plan - dubbed the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) -- that will require all travelers returning from Canada to carry a passport or yet-to-be defined alternative document as soon as the summer of 2008. This plan will freeze cross-border traffic in Western New York and do little to improve our overall security.

Louise is pleased to say that in December, 2007, Congress approved her language in the Fiscal Year 2008 Omnibus spending bill delaying the implementation of WHTI until June 2009. Also included in the bill was Louise's language withholding $75 million required by the Department of Homeland Security to implement the program until the Department reports the outcome of their multiple driver's license and technology trials, as well as provides a port-by-port infrastructure and staffing plan to Congress.

Moreover, the Department of Homeland Security must confirm that acceptable identification cards have been adequately tested to ensure operational success and privacy safeguards. This important legislation will make certain that the Department of Homeland Security develops a strong WHTI implementation plan that secures our borders while facilitating travel and trade with Canada.

While some progress has been made in recent months to ensure that WHTI will be implemented properly, there is much more work to be done. In July of 2008, New York State announced that new Enhanced Drivers Licenses will be offered statewide beginning in September. The Enhanced Drivers License complies with WHTI requirements and could be a more convenient alternative to a passport. However, this leaves less than 9 months for NYS

and DHS to ensure that the infrastructure to support Enhanced Drivers Licenses is fully operational by the June 1, 2009 implementation Date. It also leaves less than 9 months to ensure that all New Yorkers have an opportunity to apply for and receive their Enhanced Drivers License.

Another WHTI-compliant document, the NEXUS card, is also facing serious infrastructure shortfalls leading up to the full implementation date. While the NEXUS card is an important option for those who travel frequently across the border, Western New York, which is home to the third busiest northern border crossing, did not have a single open NEXUS enrollment center by the end of the Summer of 2008. Rep. Slaughter has worked to CBP to help rectify this situation, and the first NEXUS enrollment center in Western NY is set to open in September at the Whirlpool Bridge in Buffalo. Again, however, this raises questions as to whether the NEXUS card will be a viable option for frequent travelers come June 1st, and whether or not the full infrastructure to support the NEXUS program will be in place to support the third largest northern border crossing.

As 2008 comes to a close and into the first months of 2009, Rep. Slaughter will be working closely with the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, local officials, and fellow members of the Northern Border Caucus in Congress to ensure that WHTI is implemented in a responsible way that does not hamper the cross-border trade and travel that is so vital to Western NY. Rep. Slaughter will also be working with Canadian officials and Members of Parliament to create goals for WHTI implementation that will ensure that our economic relationship with our northern neighbor continues to prosper.